

# AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION RESULTS

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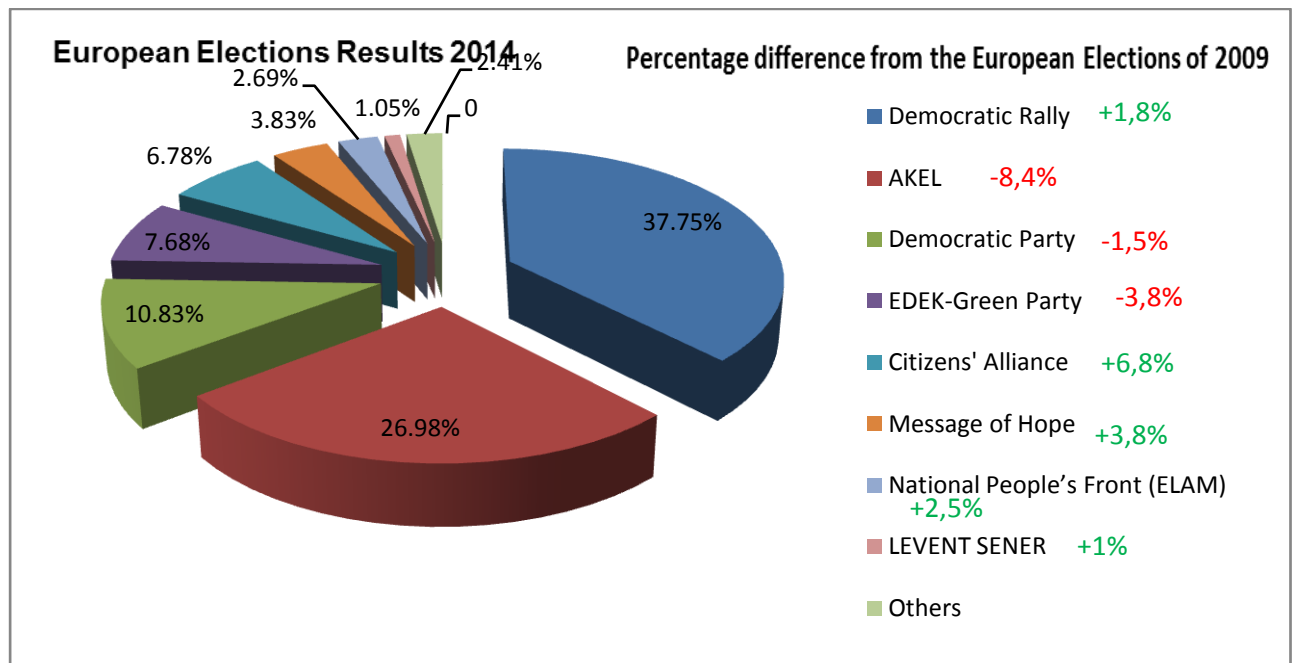
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## Cyprus

Of a total of 606.916 registered voters only 266.891 (43,97%) voted with absenteeism rising to 340.025 (56,03%). The table below presents the aggregated election results. Valid ballots amounted to 97,01%, the remaining 3% were invalid and blank ballots.

TOTALS: NATION WIDE			
Registered:	606.916	Voted:	266.891 (43.97%)
		Absenteeism:	340.025 (56.03%)
Valid:	258.914 (97.01%)	Invalid:	5.102 (1.91%)
		Blank:	2.875 (1.08%)

The next diagram shows, parties' percentages.



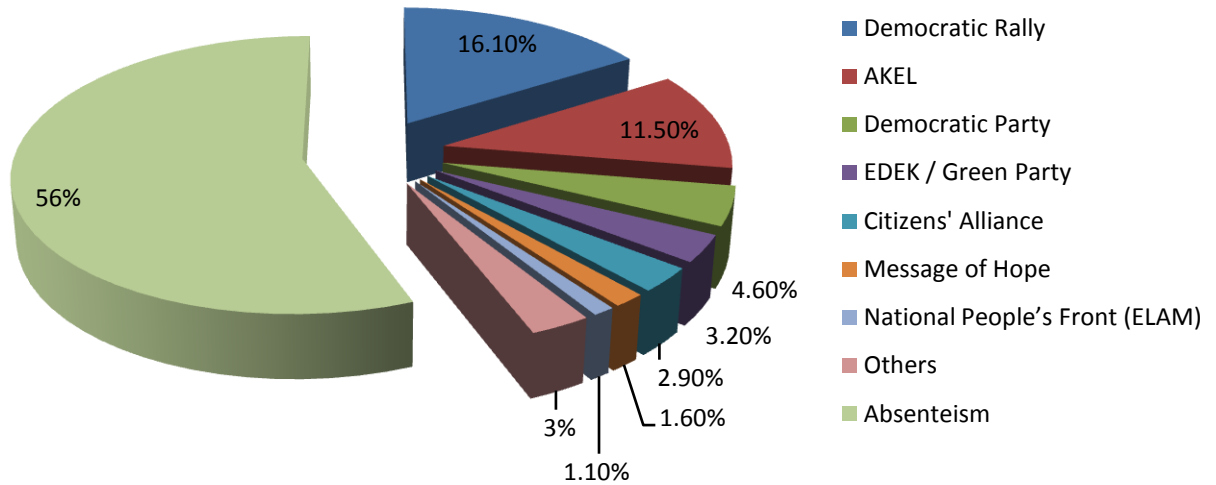
Despite the pressure of its governing rule the Democratic Rally (DISY) remained in first place with a significant difference of more than 10% from the second party Communist AKEL which recorded the biggest overall losses (32.694 votes) in relation to the 2009 European elections. The Democratic Rally is the only one of the mainstream parties which recorded an increase in its percentage showing in comparison with the 2009 European elections. But, in actual numbers the total voters who supported

the ruling party were fewer than 2009. The Democratic Party (DIKO) dropped 1,5% points but, it retained its traditional third place with 10,83% since the coalition EDEK / Green Party received a disappointing 7,68%. It is evident from the results that had EDEK sought an independent ballot, it would most likely have lost its representation in the European Parliament by the newly formed Citizens' Alliance of Giorgios Lillikas.

Another important outcome of these elections is that more than 16% of the electorate chose to vote new formations and independent candidates. A total of 31.964 voters gave their support to a new political formation. The Citizen's Alliance, Message of Hope, Animal Party Cyprus and Drasy - Eylem contested in an election for the first time. The actual votes of the Citizen's Alliance amounted to 17.549 (6,78%), the Message of Hope took 9.907 votes (3,83%), the Animal Party Cyprus 2.288 and the Drasy - Eylem 2.220 votes. The nationalist National People's Front (ELAM) drew 6.957 voters (2,69%) recording a sharp increase from the rates of the 2009 elections. Another important element which can be drawn based on the percentages obtained by the Citizen's Alliance, the Message of Hope and ELAM is that they set the foundations for their potential representation in the House of Representatives.

The following diagram shows the percentages of parties in total of registered voters. The two major parties managed to convince only 27% of registered voters to support them. It is indicative the catalytic role that citizens can have with their vote since they can shape election results either through their participation or through their abstention.

### Rates of parties in total of registered voters



Given the high absenteeism at 56% systematic research has to be conducted in order to identify the reasons and their significance that lead people not to exercise their right to vote. Clearly absenteeism is not monolithic.

It can be argued quite convincingly that the election results reflect the defeat of the political system. Despite this, we are faced with a situation where on the one hand political parties say they have taken the strong message sent by the voters and on the other they appear satisfied with their showing in the election itself.

People consider the political parties accountable for the current economic crisis. By turning their back to the political parties citizens may want to express their mistrust to the institutions and the broader political system. Citizens do not see an alternative approach which they can rely on while there seems to be an increasing trend of citizens moving away from politics altogether.

The low participation rate in the elections may also entail the element of opposition to the policies implemented by the EU, which citizens may feel are not serving national interests. In Cyprus it is evident people's frustration about the way EU handled its case in March 2013 when the country requested financial assistance. At European level the harsh austerity measures imposed on countries that needed financial support and the failure of the European Parliament to intervene and have a key

role in the decision making process may have contributed to the citizens' growing dissatisfaction towards EU institutions.

People might also believe that the decisions taken at the European Parliament – in contrast to the European Council, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF - are not affecting their lives. Having said this the fact that decision making centers are in Brussels, so far from the pain felt by the voters – may have also contributed to public frustration.

Citizens may feel that their vote is not capable of determining the distribution of MEPs. However, this is wrong since (at least for the 6th seat allocated to Cyprus) the difference between the alliance EDEK-Green Party and Citizen's Alliance was less than 2,500 votes.

The size of absenteeism may be an indication of citizens dissatisfaction that the political parties do not have the same role they had a few years ago. The Cypriot society was characterized by a high level of clientelism.

A proposal to address and perhaps curtail the phenomenon of low turnout in electoral battles is the introduction of non-constituency candidates for members of the parliament in elections. In this way it is possible to promote the horizontal vote in a number of the members of the parliament (e.g. 11 out of 56 members) so that voters can choose the most outstanding candidates for who would be voted on nationally and not by province or constituency.

## **Rest of Europe**

The Eurosceptic parties gained support across Europe mainly in Britain, France, Denmark, Austria and Greece. The debt crisis, recession, high unemployment and the harsh austerity imposed on people across Europe over the past five years have definitely affected election results.

The biggest "political earthquake" occurred in France where for the first time in French history a party of the extreme nationalists won the election. The Front National (FN) of Marine le Pen, triumphed with 25% of votes and elected 24 MEPs. The UK Independence Party, UKIP, shook the political scene in Britain after the victory of the Eurosceptic Nigel Farage. It is the first time since 1900s that a party other than Labour or the Conservatives has won a national election. The UKIP took 27% of the national vote and elected 24 MEPs. It is worth noting that turnout in Britain was 36%. The Danish People's (PVV) in Denmark and SYRIZA in Greece took the same rate of 26,6% and won both the national elections of their countries. Moreover, in Italy the Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo took second place in the preference of Italian voters with 21% and elected 17 MEPs. While the Jobbik in Hungary with 14,5% and the Golden

Dawn in Greece with 9,5% had significant gains and achieved representation in the new EU Parliament.

Despite the gains recorded by Eurosceptic and Anti-European parties it seems difficult for them to be able to form an alliance and have a major influence in the European Parliament since they do not have the same agenda and on many important issues they have diverging views. The UKIP rejects cooperation with the FN. On the other hand, Marine le Pen does not want any relations with the most extreme parties of the Greek Golden Dawn and the Hungarian Jobbik while she has failed to form an alliance with the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) of Geert Wilders.

UKIP seems to find allies (the Italian Five Star Movement, Lithuania's Order and Justice Party, the nationalist Sweden Democrats and a few anti-EU MEPs from Latvia, the Czech Republic and France). Jointly they are called the New EFD (Europe of Freedom and Democracy).

Another important point which emerges from the election results is that in the countries which are implementing or have implemented stability programs the ruling party managed to hold on to first place (except in Greece). This was true in Cyprus with the Democratic Rally dominating, in Portugal, in Ireland and Spain with the party of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

Apart from the significant changes that these elections have brought a broadly pro-European majority continues to dominate the European Parliament. The two big pro-EU blocs (the European People's Party and the Socialists and Democrats) can easily muster a majority between them in the 751-seat chamber and may work to deepen integration, especially in economic governance in an effort to end the crisis at a time when voters seem to be at least skeptical to that. The immediate and effective response to the economic crisis, growing unemployment and the tough European social policy and immigration issues will play a catalytic role in the future of the EU.

The European Parliament election results will clearly have great implications for the political landscape in Europe. Political leaders have to interpret correctly the political messages of the elections. Doing business as usual seems not to be acceptable anymore. The EU needs structural changes to become more effective and more accessible to European citizens while the institutions need to regain the trust of the Europeans citizenry they claim to serve.